



Claytonia

Newsletter of the John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society

Volume 27, Number 4

July-August 2011

www.claytonvnps.org

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Our July 21 meeting: "The Chestnut Story—Return of the Mighty Giant"



In a photo taken in the 1920s or 1930s, an enormous victim of chestnut blight dwarfs the people standing at its base.

American chestnut was once the dominant tree of the Virginia forest; a quarter or more of our hardwoods were chestnut. Chestnut was valuable as a source of timber, supplying millions of board feet of lumber per year, and it was a valuable source of food, producing edible, nutritious nuts for wildlife and livestock. Roasted chestnuts were a familiar staple of the American diet.

Then came the chestnut blight. The result was an environmental disaster, thought by many to be still the worst ever. Today, scientists and volunteers continue to work day in and day out to restore the tree to its former glory,

work that will continue past their own lifetimes, a testament to their dedication to correcting the accident of their ancestors.

Our speaker, **Cathy Mayes**, is on the board of VNPS and a member of Piedmont Chapter. She is chair of the Virginia Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation, and also a member of Old Rag Master Naturalists.

The meeting begins at **6:45 pm** at the Yorktown Public Library at the intersection of Battle Road and Route 17 in Yorktown.



From the President

No Prez' letter in this issue, since Helen was away for most of June, but before she left, she scheduled four native plant walks for us in the Williamsburg area! Our chapter is still looking for folks to lead walks in Newport News or Hampton, as well as in Gloucester and Mathews.

We are asking any members who are interested in leading a walk in those areas or can suggest someone else who could lead a walk to please contact Louise Menges at 757/229-4346 or ltmeng@verizon.net.

New members

We welcome five new members: **Phoebe Kent**, **Jan** and **John Lockwood** and **Janet Rathbun**, all of Williamsburg, and **John Powell** of Hayes.

Our May 26 meeting: Virginia's Threatened and Endangered Plants

Our speaker on May 26 was **Bruce Hill**, Professor Emeritus, Mount Vernon College (now the Mount Vernon Campus of The George Washington University). Dr. Hill began by explaining that cell biology, not botany, had been his field of study, although he has always been interested in natural history, and that his presentation was a result of his efforts to familiarize himself with the flora and fauna of this area after retiring to Virginia in 2006. He also made it clear that the plants he chose to focus on represent only a sampling of our many endangered native plants.



Photo: Chris Gwaltney

Dr. Hill fields questions from the audience.

Dr. Hill described 15 endangered species, illustrating his information about each with photos and a map of its distribution in Virginia. Some are classified as endangered on both federal and Virginia state lists and others with a wider distribution are considered threatened federally, but endangered here in Virginia.

Sensitive joint-vetch (*Aeschynomene virginica*) must grow in a tidal zone, but cannot tolerate salt water. In Virginia, its populations occur on the Potomac, Rappahanock, Mattaponi, Pamunkey, Chickahominy and James rivers. ➤

Shale barren rockcress (*Arabis serotina*) is an extremely imperiled plant which grows on shale barren ridgelines in a few counties in the western part of Virginia.

Virginia roundleaf birch (*Betula uber*) may be the rarest native U.S. tree species still existing in the wild. The only known natural population grows along a creek in Smyth County in southwest Virginia. ➤

Piratebush (*Buckleya distichophylla*), a very rare large shrub in the sandalwood family, is parasitic on the roots of eastern hemlock and pine. In Virginia it is found on Poor Mountain near Roanoke.

Small-anthered bittercress (*Cardamine micranthera*) grows only in the Dan River system in Virginia and North Carolina on 36 known sites (about 1000 plants total). It was first identified in 1939, and then not found again until 1985.



Photo: Jim Stasz
@ USDA-NRCS PLANTS
Database



Photo: Jane Villa Lobos
@ USDA-NRCS PLANTS
Database

Bentley's coralroot (*Corallorhiza bentleyi*) was named in 1998 the rarest non-tropical orchid in North America; its only occurrence in Virginia is in Bath County. ➤

Smooth purple coneflower (*Echinacea laevigata*) is restricted to open sites with low competition, with 7 populations in Virginia in the Upper Roanoke, Middle Roanoke, and Upper Dan watersheds.

Virginia sneezeweed (*Helenium virginicum*) is a rare wildflower found only in Virginia, in Augusta and Rockingham Counties in sinkholes and ponds.

Swamp pink (*Helonias bullata*), a member of the lily family, requires saturated but not flooded soil. It is often collected and doesn't produce many viable seeds. It occurs in Augusta, Henrico, Caroline and Nelson Counties. ➤

Small whorled pogonia (*Isotria medeoloides*), an orchid, has been documented in 104 populations (approx. 5000 plants) on the East Coast. Among those populations are ones in eight Virginia counties, including James City and Gloucester.

Peter's Mountain mallow (*Iliamna corei*) is the rarest plant in the U.S., known only from the Narrows Preserve, a site on Peter's Mountain in Giles County, Virginia. Its seeds require a burn to break dormancy. By 1992, only 3 plants were left. ➤

Leechbrush (*Nestronia umbellula*) is a shrub which is parasitic on the roots of oaks and other hardwoods, as well as on pines. It occurs in 5 counties in south-central Virginia near its border with North Carolina.

Eastern prairie fringed orchid (*Platanthera leucophaea*) grows in tall-grass prairies and bogs and is pollinated by hawk moths. It may be extinct in Virginia; the last sighting was in 1983, when 3 were seen in Augusta County.

Michaux's sumac (*Rhus michauxii*), named for the French botanist, grows in disturbed areas and has its largest population on Fort Pickett, near Blackstone, Virginia.

Virginia spirea (*Spiraea virginiana*) is a woody shrub in the rose family which occurs in 4 counties in the southwest tip of Virginia. These populations flower, but are not producing seeds. ➤

Most of these endangered plants occupy fragile niches, are losing their habitats (some almost certainly their pollinators, as well) and probably begun to suffer population decline with the arrival of European colonists! Many thanks to Dr. Hill for a fascinating and thought-provoking lecture.

Louise Menges



Photo: NC Orchid's Photostream



Photo provided by our speaker



Photo: T.F. Wieboldt @ www.dcr.virginia.gov



Photo copyright Hugh and Carol Nourse (Center for Plant Conservation website)

May 1 walk to a Five Forks BMP

What is a BMP, you may be wondering? I certainly did, and field trip leader **Phillip Merritt** explained that BMP stands for Best Management Practices (not a very helpful name, he admits) and refers to either retention or detention basins used to control stormwater runoff.

To quote from Phillip's blog, "Most BMPs aren't worth a second look, but this particular one was constructed along a local stream and has a nice selection of native wetland plants. I scheduled the walk to coincide with the blooms of some swamp doghobble that was growing along the edges of the BMP, but there was a very small turnout since there was a competing plant walk on the same day to see sweetleaf in bloom."

This excursion yielded views of blooming crossvine (*Bignonia capreolata*), wild grape, yellow pond lily (*Nuphar advena*), swamp doghobble (*Leucothoe axillaris*), swamp dogwood (*Cornus foemina*), tulip poplar, American holly and elderberry, as well as cinnamon and royal ferns.

Visit Phillip's blog at www.howitgrows.com (now also accessible from our website) for a more complete description of this walk and a link to a lot more pictures!

Louise Menges

New Kent Forestry Center walk on May 1

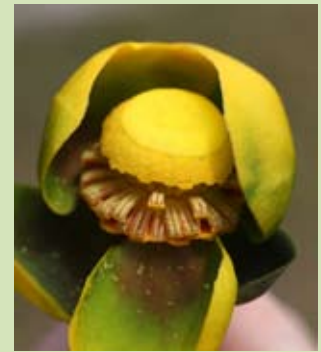
Donna Ware led us to a plant community we had never before visited on a field trip in the New Kent Forestry Center, assisted by Forest Education Specialist Lisa Deaton. This site is on an isolated piece of higher ground (deep sand) adjacent to the Chickahominy River. Just before entering the trail we were greeted with the lavender blooms of lyre-leaf sage (*Salvia lyrata*). Along the Cactus Trail, as it is titled, were numerous bracken ferns and a few cinnamon, netted chain and royal ferns and, yes, we soon came across cactus—eastern prickly-pear cactus (*Opuntia humifusa*, we think!). The cacti were sprawling and twisting all over the sand with small buds developing, and were not growing in their usual form (which warrants more investigation by Donna).



Swamp doghobble, whose flowers remind us that it is a member of the Ericaceae family.



Swamp dogwood in bloom



A peek inside a yellow pond lily flower.



Crossvine

Photos: Phillip Merritt



Prickly pear in bud



Sticky catchfly, a wild pink (*Silene caroliniana*)

The group saw numerous wild pinks blooming in various areas, along with a fringe tree (*Chionanthus virginicus*), much rattlesnake weed, a few fetterbushes (*Leucothoe racemosa*), Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*) and lyre-leaf rockcress (*Arabidopsis lyrata*), the latter being a mountain disjunct. We had just missed the bloom period for horse sugar, also known as sweetleaf (*Symplocos tinctoria*). Donna pointed out the difference between mockernut hickory (*Carya alba*) and sand hickory (*Carya pallida*): there are numerous silvery glands on

the back of the sand hickory leaves, resembling sand. We also examined the leaves of black oak (*Quercus velutina*), overcup oak (*Quercus lyrata*), sand post oak (*Quercus margarettae*) and farkleberry/sparkleberry (*Vaccinium arboreum*). Deerberry (*Vaccinium stamineum*) were in bloom, whereas highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium formosum*), red-berried greenbrier (*Smilax walteri*), and roundleaf greenbrier (*Smilax rotundifolia*) were beginning to make berries. Various penstemons were budding, including one that we have yet to identify. Donna was surprised and delighted to see Robin's plantain



The unidentified penstemon

(*Erigeron pulchellus*), another mountain disjunct, which was at the end of its bloom period. A mystery plant which looked similar to butterfly weed without the milky latex was discovered near the Robin's plantain. Another mystery plant was a sweet goldenrod look-alike that didn't have glands in its leaf tissue as does sweet goldenrod (*Solidago odora*). This area was bordered by the Chickahominy River and a swamp, so there were also lots of bald-cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) to enjoy as well. I can't wait to go back to see these plants in different seasons.



Robin's plantain

Jan Newton

You can see all of Jan's photos of this walk on our chapter's new Flickr site; go to the Photo Gallery page on our website at www.claytonvnps.org.



A comparison of the leaves of three oaks. From top: black oak, overcup oak and sand post oak.

Photos: Jan Newton

May 9 Open House at Sassafras Farm

An open house at Sassafras Farm, **Denise Greene's** native plant nursery just across the bridge in Gloucester, was sponsored by the Master Naturalists. There was a good assortment of Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, Bird Club people, Native Plant Society people and the usual hybrids, some of whom are shown in the accompanying photo. Denise is pointing to a shrub that was utterly covered in white blossoms. None of us could guess what it was. When she said, "Mock orange!", the first question was, "If they bloom like that, why do people bother with nonnative varieties?" All we could do was scratch our heads.

Kathi Mestayer



Photo: Kathi Mestayer

Denise Greene points out a blooming native mock orange (*Philadelphus inodorus*) to open house visitors.

A walk around W&M's School of Education on May 20



Photo: Louise Menges

From ripe serviceberries...



Photo: Phillip Merritt

...to a juicy cobbler!

Phillip Merritt led a large group of us on a tour of the landscaping surrounding the School of Ed, pointing out the College's use of rain gardens to capture water from this building's downspouts and support communities of moisture-loving native plants, as well as other landscaping near the building featuring native species.

Planted in or around the rain gardens were many blue flag (*Iris versicolor*), serviceberry trees (*Amelanchier arborea*) in (tasty) fruit, and, surprisingly, butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), a plant usually associated with well-drained locations, which seemed to be thriving!

Among the plantings along walkways were *Lonicera sempervirens* "John Clayton", our native yellow honeysuckle, trained to climb supporting posts in the building's courtyard, eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), and growing along the wood's edge, northern catalpa.

We entered the densely wooded ravine behind the School of Ed to travel along a newly built elevated walkway and paved path which connects



Photo: Phillip Merritt

Blue flag in bloom in a rain garden.



Photo: Jan Newton

The beautiful flowers of northern catalpa (*Catalpa speciosa*), a member of the trumpet-creeper (Bignoniaceae) family. Prior to European settlement, this tree's range seems to have been confined to a small area of the central Mississippi Valley basin. (Souce: USDA)

this new campus with the College's main campus at Compton Drive near William & Mary Hall. As we walked, we saw blooming wood vamp (*Decumaria barbara*) climbing up trees on either side of the walkway, green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*) and large loblolly pine, American holly, tulip poplar and American beech.

Louise Menges

Lots more photos on our website at www.claytonvnps.org: Phillip's photos are posted on Original Photo Gallery, "Clayton's Natives" and Jan's are on New Photo Gallery Site, "ClaytonVNPS".



Photo: Jan Newton

Wood vamp in bloom in the ravine.

Lance, Pat and Edie's excellent adventure

On Tuesday, July 21, **Pat Baldwin** and **Edie Bradbury** decided to join my son **Skye**, my two dogs and me for what I considered a leisurely 4 mile walk through **Sandy Point State Forest in King William County**, about 15 minutes from where I live. Typically I bicycle through the area, but since my guests were not into biking, I decided to use the opportunity to work on my son's solo biking skills while the others attempted to identify just about everything we saw. The walk went through several habitat types, including a recent burn area, mature forests, open fields and a tidal freshwater portion of the Mattaponi River.

The walk started well enough, with a cool morning, a native rose and several flowers identified while I got my son all situated with his bicycle; the walk had not even started yet and already we had some very interesting finds. Off we went at a very sedate pace of about ½ mile an hour, much slower than I have ever experienced this area before. Edie designated herself the official record keeper, and was a bit challenged to keep up with all of the plant names Pat threw at her, with me supplying an occasional addition. Pat certainly knows his plants, so I was perfectly content to let him take the lead on identifying practically everything we saw.

As we sauntered along, there was definitely a lot to see and check out, with Pat pulling out one bag after another for samples to take back to the college. After about 3½ hours of checking out over 100 different species, we finally made it to the river, my personal favorite portion of the adventure. Edie has not yet been able to type up the list, so I can't share it with you here, but it was certainly long and filled with a large variety of herbaceous, vining, perennial, annual, ferny and woody vegetation.



Shrubs blooming along the Mattaponi's bank.

After a picnic lunch, I led our intrepid explorers on the next stage of searching, where we found many more wetland and riverine species, including hibiscus, Turk's cap lily, pickerel weed (*Pontederia cordata*), cardinal flower, 3-square (*Scirpus americanus*), a wetland rose (*Rosa palustris*) and the protected sensitive joint-vetch (*Aeschynomene virginica*). The river portion included wading, and I usually just go in with whatever I happen to have on and do not concern myself with getting wet; especially on a hot day, it actually feels good. Pat and Edie attempted to skirt the edge of the water, and after a few minutes, I saw Pat trying to duck under a very large and low growing shrub. He finally made it, but realized it was futile to try to keep his feet dry, as many more obstacles lay along the shoreline. Even though we started off near low tide, the tide was also coming in, and so did Pat.

Pat and Edie were both very pleased with the number of native plants found, and Pat has many interesting specimens to add to his collections. As we headed back, though, it didn't take long before they realized why the walk to the river was not very tiring—it was mostly downhill, and during the cooler part of the day.

Overall, a fun and successful trip. Pat and Edie got to see a large variety of native plants, my son almost learned to ride his bike on his own, and I had 2 very tired dogs and 2 very tired people. If anyone would like to join me in exploring this area, just let me know, as I go there often—although, after reading this you may think twice about joining a trip I lead, even if I do say it is an easy walk! **Lance Gardner**

Upcoming John Clayton Chapter walks

Thursday, July 14 at 6:30 pm: An evening walk at Stonehouse Elementary Habitat Garden

Jan Newton will lead a walk through the Stonehouse Elementary School's Habitat Garden at 3651 Rochambeau Drive in Williamsburg. The Habitat contains over 80 species of Virginia native small trees, shrubs, perennials and ferns and features plants that attract birds and butterflies.

Register at (757)566-3646 or jnewton110@cox.net.

Saturday, July 16, 9am: A walk in the College Woods

Botanist **Dr. Gus Hall** will lead a plant walk to Squirrel Point on Lake Matoaka, looking for native plants and providing some history of the College Woods. Meet in the William and Mary Hall parking lot (free on Saturdays).

To register, call Helen Hamilton at 757/564-4494 or helen48@cox.net.



Top, bird's foot violets, and bottom, a few of the thousands of lupines Lance found in bloom in April.

Photos taken by Lance Gardner on a visit in April.



Spangled fritillary on bee balm.

Saturday, July 23 at 8 am: Trail walk in Freedom Park

Walk the trail in Freedom Park to Jolly Pond schools with **Helen Hamilton**, through woodlands, swamp, and meadow, with a variety of plants, butterflies, and dragonflies. Meet in Freedom Park parking lot.

To register, call Helen Hamilton at 757/564-4494 or helen48@cox.net.

Friday, August 19 at 6 pm: A nature trail at Jamestown

A tour of the nature trail at the Jamestown Information Station on the Colonial Parkway with **Helen Hamilton**. Expect to see late summer wildflowers and grasses.

To register, call Helen Hamilton at 757/564-4494 or helen48@cox.net.

Saturday, August 27 at 8 am: College Landing walk

Meet at College Landing for a plant walk with **Helen Hamilton** to see aquatic wildflowers and grasses.

To register, call Helen Hamilton at 757/564-4494 or helen48@cox.net.

May's Wildflower of the Month: American wisteria

American wisteria (*Wisteria frutescens*) is a welcome alternative to the invasive Chinese and Japanese wisterias. The branches twine freely up tree trunks and trellises, and hanging masses of beautiful purplish-white flower clusters cover the plant in spring. The blossoms of the native and introduced species are similar, but those of the native vine have no fragrance. Further, the native vine blooms later, after the leaves appear, while the flowers appear on the Asian vines in April before leaf expansion.

Wisterias are high-climbing vines with feather-compound toothless leaves—only subtle differences in the leaves distinguish the native from the introduced species. Fruits are brown, bean-like pods that persist until winter; the native wisteria fruits are smooth while the Asian species produce velvety pods.

The native wisteria grows slowly and is easy to control with pruning. This plant is not aggressive and is well-suited for garden plantings, on a trellis or along a deck railing.

American wisteria prefers moist or wet woods and riverbanks. The plant grows throughout eastern U.S. but is found in only a few southeastern counties in Virginia.

June's: Rattlesnake master

Rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*) is an unmistakable bluish perennial plant with spiny-edged, yucca-like leaves and round heads of tiny 5-parted florets, often concealed by green bracts. The leaves are mostly found at the base of the plant and are reduced on the stem.



Photo: Helen Hamilton

Growing to 3 feet tall, rattlesnake master is a good plant for the back of a perennial border, or in a meadow. Their spiny leaves make walking through clumps of these plants difficult, and also make them unpalatable to grazing livestock. The flower and seedheads last a long time and are good for indoor floral arrangements.

Found in woods and open places in wet or dry soil, thickets and prairies from Minnesota east to New Jersey and south, rattlesnake master is native in Virginia, mostly to south-central counties.

American Indians used the root as a poultice for snakebites and many other disorders; traditionally, root tincture was used as a diuretic and also for female reproductive disorders. Chewing the root increases saliva flow.

...and July's: Soft rush

Soft rush (*Juncus effusus*) is not a grass, but an erect, perennial herb which grows 3 feet tall and forms dense clumps. The stems are stout, round and unbranched, with a bristle tip. There are no apparent leaves, and the flowers appear in an inconspicuous greenish brown cluster on the upper half of the stem. Each fruit capsule contains many minute seeds. Most of the stems remain greenish through winter.

Soft rush grows in sunny wet meadows, freshwater marshes, and shrubby swamps from Newfoundland to North Dakota, and south to Florida and Texas. Native to every county in Virginia, this clump-forming plant makes a nice addition to damp spots in the home garden, the spiky stems contrasting with broad-leaved perennials and shrubs.

Muskrats feed on the rootstalks, and birds find shelter among the stems. Jamestown colonists opened the stems to extract a continuous white fiber which they used for candle wicks.

Helen Hamilton

Native Return works to create native wildlife habitats

An interview with Christina Kobland, founder and President of Native Return, LLC, a Pennsylvania-based for-profit company that works with landholders to create self-sustaining native plant communities, was featured in *Friends of Animals Act•ion Line's* Spring 2011 issue.

Native Return was founded with the goal of convincing others to share their land with wildlife, educating the public about these matters, and restoring large ecosystems to provide habitat where it didn't exist before, including creating important wildlife corridors.



Photo: Helen Hamilton



Photo: Phillip Merritt

To quote Christina Kobland, “We are currently working on a school project replacing non-native plants with hundreds of native species that support wildlife... We are also specifying the plant material and maintenance protocols for the Philadelphia Water Department’s first Stormwater Model Basin Retrofit project, replacing typical mowed lawn with native plants. Again, this benefits wildlife and will also prevent large amounts of stormwater runoff because native plants have deep and extensive root systems adapted to area soils.”

Reprinted with permission from *Act•ionLine*, the Friends of Animals’ magazine, 777 Post Road, Darien, CT 06820.

Go to www.nativereturn.com to learn more about this organization’s efforts. Thanks to Shirley Gellis for sharing this information.

Louise Menges

What’s going on at the Williamsburg Botanical Garden?

(All events are in the Ellipse Garden at Freedom Park from 10 to 11:30 am.)

Jul. 16,
Aug. 20, **Butterflies—educational, planting milkweed and tagging**
Sept. 17

Oct. 15 **Red Emperor tulip planting in Therapy Garden
with Barb Dunbar**

Nov. 19 **Snakes program!**

For more information go to www.williamsburgbotanicalgarden.org
or call 220-3575.

Master Naturalist Basic Training Class begins in August

The **Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists** will conduct its sixth basic training class this fall and winter, beginning August 30, 2011 and continuing through March 14, 2012. Classes will meet about every two weeks, and volunteer service hours can be started prior to completion of classes; the requirements to be a Certified Virginia Master Naturalist could be completed as early as March 2012.

Class dates and schedule are included in the Application Package, which is available online at www.historicrivers.org.

For more info, contact:

Jennifer Trevino (phone 757/903-8983, email jenny451@yahoo.com);

Sharon Plocher (email sharonjp4@cox.net) or

Shirley Devan (phone 757/813-1322, email sedevan52@cox.net).

Shirley Devan

Calendar

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The Library is located at the intersection of Battle Rd. and Rt. 17 in Yorktown.

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Check our website at www.claytonvnps.org for additional walks and events which may not have made this newsletter issue.

Membership Form for John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society

(Place checks in the boxes below next to your selections.)

I am a **new member** of the John Clayton Chapter **renewing member** of the John Clayton Chapter

Name		
Address		
City	State	Zip
Email*	Phone*	

I would like to receive my newsletters electronically at the email address above.

Membership dues

Individual (\$30) Family (\$40) Patron (\$50) Sustaining (\$100) Life (\$500)

Student (\$15) Associate (\$40) —for groups who designate one person as delegate

I wish to make an additional contribution in the amount of \$ to John Clayton Chapter to VNPS

This is a gift membership; please include a card with my name as donor.

I have time a little time no time to help with activities.

I do not wish to be listed in a chapter directory.

**Please Note:* John Clayton Chapter does not distribute any of our membership information to other organizations. It is used only by the officers and chairpersons of our chapter.

Make your check payable to **VNPS** and mail to: VNPS Membership Chair
400 Blandy Farm Lane, Unit 2
Boyce, VA 22610